

YOU AND YOUR 'STUFF'



LIFESTYLE

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WHY?

A simple cartoon about 'trash' caused quite a stir when it was released in 2009. Produced by Annie Leonard and Free Range Studios, this short film is about the way we make, use, and throw away 'stuff'. The production unleashed a torrent of pent-up demand for honest conversations about the impacts of our consumer-crazed culture on people and the planet. It is still available on YouTube and is fun to watch to start a discussion about our approach to finite resources: <https://youtu.be/9GorqroigqM>

'The Story of Stuff' project has expanded to include films on cosmetics, water bottles, junk mail, microbeads and in fact almost anything which degrades the planet to provide us with 'stuff' we probably don't really need. All engagingly told and with solutions as well as highlighting problems: <https://www.storyofstuff.org/>

We live in a society that places a high value on 'owning' and 'being up to date' as it makes us feel good about ourselves. Shopping has become a leisure activity for many alongside (or ahead of) time with friends and family, crafts, sports or other hobbies. One result of this is that we buy stuff we don't really need, and it is then thrown away before being fully used.

UK households generate around 27 million tonnes of waste a year. Much still ends up in landfill sites, which produce carbon dioxide and methane gas, affecting climate and biodiversity. There is some encouragement – the amount of biodegradable waste taken to landfill (where it will produce methane) has been halved in the ten years to 2019. In the UK as a whole, household waste recycling is 46%, with Wales leading the way at 56%. There is still a long way to go – Germany is at 67%.



LIFESTYLE

You and your 'stuff'

HOW?

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

The natural world reminds us nothing is wasted in creation. Autumn leaves become spring's fertile mulch and fallen trees rot to provide homes for insects and return nutrients to the soil. Every element has a fruitful role. Yet in the UK we still buy and throw away an average of half a tonne of waste per year. To reduce waste, we need to tackle both ends of the cycle; to both buy less and recycle more. It is both a technical exercise and a spiritual discipline.

See our longer resource about recycling to see what can be recycled and how your church can help.

BUY LESS

Over-consumption is the biggest driver of climate change. Almost everything you buy will have depleted the world's resources: fossil fuels, fish or phosphorus for fertiliser. The world population is approaching 8 billion people. If each of them lived the way we do in the UK, we would need over 2 and a half Earths to provide all our wants.

Anything we can do to stop that depletion has to help. Buying less and buying second hand are easy wins. There is a growing body of evidence that buying less is good for our mental health and our friendships as we worry less about what we have and more about how we relate to other people.

BUY SECOND HAND

The rise of a second-hand culture means there are numerous places where you can buy pre used goods; in person at charity shops, on Facebook and on dedicated websites: <https://www.preloved.co.uk/>, <https://www.gumtree.com/> or <https://www.depop.com/>

SWITCH OFF SUNDAYS

Some bloggers and influencers are suggesting we should enjoy a full day social media free, a day a week without electrical equipment and a day a week putting down our phones. It's a great way to stop the advance of constant consumerism, to get outside, to meet with friends and focus on what is really important in life. Might this have been advised once before in Exodus 20?



LIFESTYLE

You and your 'stuff'

SEE WHAT'S IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

You can also relieve your neighbours of things they no longer need, but which are useful to you by looking at: <https://www.freecycle.org/> or <https://nextdoor.co.uk/>

Or maybe you just need to borrow something? Lots of informal WhatsApp groups were created during the 2020 lockdown, why not carry that on or create one in your community? Or take a look at Streetbank. Started in 2010 when Sam borrowed a cup of sugar, it has now grown to 13,000 neighbours willing to lend things: <https://www.streetbank.com/splash?locale=en-GB>

Libraries are springing up where you can rent kids clothes for a few months until they grow out of them and others where you can rent a smart suit, hat or dress for that special event.

RESCUE AND REVAMP

Upcycling is the act of taking something no longer in use and giving it a second life and new function. In doing so, the finished product often becomes more practical, valuable and beautiful than what it previously was. In recent years, interest in upcycling has grown significantly and you will find inspiration and tutorials on the internet. Here are a couple:

<https://www.upcyclethat.com/>

<https://www.idealhome.co.uk/diy-and-decorating/upcycled-furniture-ideas-273970>

FORGET 'FAST' FASHION

The fashion industry has a problem. Questions are being asked about the environmental ethics of raw materials, factory working conditions and the limited life of many articles of clothing. Less well publicised issues of the industry are the CO2 emissions and water use. (The UN tells us one pair of jeans uses 10,000 litres of water).

If you are buying new, look for brands promoting sustainable fashion. Tearfund suggests some here: <https://wearetearfund.org/article/ethical-fashion-tips-for-autumn/>



LIFESTYLE

You and your 'stuff'

LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

Some thought-provoking history about how the world became consumerist:

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210120-how-the-world-became-consumerist>

A circular economy is based on the principle of keeping products and materials in use, without generating waste. Two UK charities are working hard to create systems where this is achievable:

<https://wrap.org.uk/>

<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/what-is-the-circular-economy>

If you are interested in fashion, take a look at the work of the Centre for Sustainable Fashion based at the London College of Fashion: <https://www.sustainable-fashion.com/>

Joy in Enough. The Plenty! Course: This is a timely course on the way our economic and social systems influence us to behave in a way which is damaging to the environment, the climate and to humankind. Produced by 'Green Christian' the issues are discussed in a scriptural context, and participants encouraged to think about what the Bible encourages us to do differently: <https://joyinenough.org/resources/plenty/>

BOOKS

The Day the World Stops Shopping, J B MacKinnon, Bodley Head, 2021

Buying God: Consumerism and Theology, Eve Poole, SCM Press, 2018

Prosperity without growth, Tim Jackson, Routledge, 2016